

DRAFT
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FBI INTERCEPTION OF LETTERS WRITTEN BY LEE HARVEY OSWALD

Synopsis: According to recently released Commission Documents, a letter from Oswald to the FPCC was given to the FBI in October 1963, apparently in photographic form. Other documents reveal that Oswald's June 10, 1963 letter to the Worker (interception of which has been known for some time) was photographed for the FBI. Previously available Commission records show little attention given to this matter; the FBI appears to have played it down. As occurred earlier, the N.O. FBI did not follow up a lead about an FPCC office and chapter there.

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The new evidence:

(A) From CD 28, page 2-3: (Report of SA O'Flaherty, New York, December 1, 1963)
"On October 27, 1963, NY T-1 advised that during late October, 1963, he had had an opportunity to observe certain material maintained at Fair Play for Cuba Committee headquarters, 799 Broadway, New York City. NY T-1 stated that among the material which he observed was the following handwritten letter: " (The text of V.T. Lee Exhibit 4 follows.)

From CD 75, page 672-3 (Report of SA DeBrueys, Dallas, December 2, 1963)
"Under date of October 27, 1963, New York Confidential Informant T-1 made available the contents of a letter directed to Mr. HENRY LEE of the Fair Play for Cuba Committee, New York City by LEE H. OSWALD. This letter is quoted herein below." (The text of V.T. Lee Exhibit 4 follows.)

*Self only
Linda LHO
have produced
for photo*

(B) June letter to the Worker:

From CD 7, page 328:
"Under date of November 26, 1963, the FBI Laboratory advised as follows:
Specimens received November 25, 1963, from FBI, New Orleans....

Qc37 One photograph of envelope bearing postmark "NEW ORLEANS LA
8 JUN 1963 1 30 PM", bearing handwritten address "The Worker
23 W. 26th St. New York 10, N. Y." and handwritten return address
"P. O. Box 30061 New Orleans, La."

Qc38 Photographs of two-page handwritten letter to "The 'Worker' 23
W. 26th St.," signed "Lee H. Oswald"

Q39 Post Office change of address card, POD Form 3573, postmarked at
New Orleans, La., bearing address "The Worker 26 W. 23th St.
New York 10, N Y"."

Nature of the interceptions:

(A) FPCC letter: CD 28 is dated December 1; the first FBI interview with V.T. Lee was December 3 (CD 60, pp. 68-9; 10H87). He had no specific recollection of correspondence with Oswald; after checking the files, he turned over the letters on December 6 (CD 165, pp. 4-13). Lee Exhibit 4 was included; thus, the original, as turned over by Lee, could not have been the source of the text set out in CD 28.

The text as set forth in CD 28 is a quite careful transcription of the (messily) handwritten letter. The copy correctly reflects the indentations and abbreviations of the internal addresses, punctuation peculiarities, and a number of spelling errors (which are indicated in the usual way, by underlining). It is conceivable that the FBI's informant laboriously made such a transcript, but it is much more likely that he provided a photograph. (The photo should still be in the FBI's files.)

(The text does not indicate the letter was directed to Henry Lee, as claimed in CD 75. That may have been a simple error, or the informant may have had access to the envelope. One may ask whether he gave the FBI any other letters that Oswald had written before October 27 (Lee Exhibits 5-7), and if not, why not. (Perhaps

just because the files were confused?) The reference to "Henry Lee" in CD 75 may signify that the pre-assassination report to the field offices had a bit more information than CD 28, but I doubt if that is true in any substantive sense. (B) Worker Letter: We can confirm that the FBI got the copies of the letter before the assassination. Arnold Johnson of the CPUSA was interviewed by the FBI on December 3, apparently for the first time; that is when he turned over the correspondence with Oswald (CE 1145, pp. 7-21; 10H96-7). The letter Qc38 is Johnson Exhibit 1; the other two items are not Johnson exhibits and apparently were not turned over to the FBI.

CD 7, pages 328-9, were withheld until the recent review; I can see no possible reason for withholding other than these three items. (I had asked under the Freedom of Information Act for the material on these pages relating to the lab examination of the gun magazines found at Alba's garage, and was given only the last paragraph of page 329.)

I feel that the significance of these pages is not simply in the fact of the interception, which was already known. It is noted in the Kaack report (CE 826, page 3) and (therefore ?) in that part of the Summary Report, CD 1, which purports to list what the FBI knew about Oswald before the assassination (page 35). The change of address card is noted in the Kaack report. (p.4) What is interesting is not just that the FBI had this information but that they were in a position to (or went to the trouble to) make photos. They also seem to have made off with the original of the change-of-address card. (Apparently the "c" in "Qc37" and "Kc25" means "copy," not "confidential".) (I would guess that either they fished the card out of the garbage after it was processed, or the FBI had its man working on the mailing list regularly. The FBI got a later change-of-address card and a mailing label from an informant on the same day Johnson was turning over the correspondence - December 3 (CE 1145, page 1).)

Incidental remark: I doubt if there is any significance to the discrepancy between the June 8 postmark and the June 10 date on the letter.

Perhaps the most interesting aspect of this matter is the degree to which it was hidden, both in contemporaneous and later reports. It's a bit weird.

Other interceptions:

The following has been well known for some time; it is presented here as a reminder of what FBI habits seem to have been.

(1) The 5/12/60 Fain report (CE 821) was based on a report that Marguerite Oswald bought a money order and sent it to Lee in Russia. This may have involved an interception of mail, or maybe just inquiries at the bank. (See CE 833, # 1.)

(2) The Fain report of 8/30/62 (CE 824) was apparently the result of Oswald's contact with the Soviet Embassy (see pp. 1, 4). On the other hand, Fain testified that this contact was not the reason for the reinterview (4H419, 421), and it is true that a previous report had noted that Oswald was planning to tell the Embassy his wife's current address. Nonetheless, I suspect that the FBI knew of his letter to the Embassy independently of what Oswald had told them. A hearsay State Department report dated November 22 on information furnished by the FBI reports that he was interrogated in August 1962 "after visit to Soviet Embassy in Washington." This is clearly incorrect, but tends to confirm that the Embassy contact was a major reason for the reinterview. (CD 294) (CE 823, p.12)

(3) Oswald's April letter to the FPCC was noted by the FBI almost immediately, as reflected by the Hosty report (CE 829, p. 2). (Lee Exh. 1 is the letter.) The source appears to have been a member of the FPCC, rather than a mail cover, since he "could furnish no further information." (CE 833, # 8)

(4) On November 18, 1963, the Washington Field Office of the FBI learned about Oswald's letter to the Soviet Embassy (CE 834, # 69; CE 15). (CE 834 indicates only that the informant reported that Oswald had been in contact with the Soviet Embassy in Mexico City; this formulation does not give away the mail cover, but CE 833, # 28 reveals that the information received concerned Oswald's letter.) Allen & Scott, who have good sources but are grossly unreliable, reported that the FBI actually put a copy of the letter in their files (11/20/67 column; BF 731).

(5) Arnold Johnson suggested that the letter which he received from Oswald after the assassination had been opened (10H104; Johnson Exh. 7). Liebeler did take up Johnson's suggestion that the handwriting be checked (5/1/64 memo to Eisenberg; PH 463#2); however, as far as I know there was no interest in the possibility that the letter had been intercepted by the authorities.

Ruth?
I know of no evidence that Oswald's outgoing mail was intercepted, or that this ever occurs. (It is true that the Hosty report does attribute the April letter to Dallas T-2, but it is standard procedure to re-number and re-identify informants in each new report. That is, any non-Dallas source would ordinarily be given a Dallas T-number. (Compare Accessories, Ch. 9.) It is true, as Sylvia Meagher concluded, that one would have expected the FBI to have been more inquisitive about Oswald's incoming mail (such as guns) than they apparently were.)

What the FBI told the Warren Commission about these intercepts:

Not very much, it seems. As noted above, the Worker letter is in the Kaack report and the proper part of CD 1. However, the intercepted letter to the FPCC is noted only in that part of CD 1 relating to information obtained after the assassination (page 63).

I suspect that the N.O. office (i.e., DeBrueys) did not want to call attention to this interception. CD 75 is from Dallas, but the reporting agent is DeBrueys and it deals almost entirely with New Orleans matters. As quoted above, the information about the FPCC letter is attributed to "NY T-1", contrary to the usual practice. In addition, page 672 of CD 75 bears the initials of Dallas SA Gemberling. The effect, if not the intent, is to draw attention from the fact that the intercepted letter should have been (and probably was) sent to New Orleans, where the alleged FPCC chapter was operating.

In June 1964, at the Commission's request, various FBI field offices compiled reports on the activities of several pro- and anti-Castro movements. The report for the FPCC in N.O., just released, is strikingly argumentative and defensive (CD 1085(a)(4)). The author (presumably DeBrueys) notes that contacts with Cuban sources in 1963 failed to indicate any "significant" FPCC activity other than Oswald's. He reports inadequately and briefly on Oswald's activity, and then quotes at some length from V.T. Lee's letter of May 29, 1963 to Oswald (Lee Exh. 2) as confirmation that there was no N.O. FPCC chapter at that time. Needless to say, the author does not mention the intercepted letter, in which Oswald claimed the existence of such a chapter, much less point out that he had that information before the assassination.

I know of just one item which indicates that the Commission knew about the FBI's access to information about the FPCC and the Worker and decided to be discreet about it. They noted that the information which these (and other) organizations disclosed voluntarily "is in all cases consistent with other data in the possession of the Commission" (WR 289).

What the FBI did when it got the FPCC letter:

Nothing that I can be sure of. It is not listed as being in the headquarters file on Oswald (CE 834); neither is the information about the April letter to the FPCC or the June Worker letter (or, for that matter, the DeBrueys report). This suggests to me that the file was purged or the list is incomplete.

The letter's presence in CD 75 suggests that it was sent to N.O. or Dallas (or both), as would have been expected. It is not mentioned in any available report that I know of; that may be understandable, since most were dated before October 27. (The Kaack report is dated October 31, but the information may not have reached him in time for inclusion, if he had been inclined to use it.)

The transcription in CD 75 is not as complete (internal FPCC address omitted) and not as precise (spelling errors fixed, abbreviations changed, etc.) as that in CD 28. Perhaps CD 75 reflects the form in which the letter was sent to the field office(s).

One would expect the FPCC letter to be in the N.O. FPCC file. I have been denied access to the six items in that file which have not been made public already. I was told that one of the available items (the DeBrueys report) was prepared to cover the rest of the items. Either I was misinformed or the letter was not properly put in that file. (The Worker letter was obviously in a N.O. field office file, presumably not that for the FRCC.)

Note on date and contents of letter to FPCC:

The letter is not dated, but evidently was written in response to Lee's letter of May 29, 1963 (Lee Exh. 3), and while Oswald had P.O. Box 30061 (June 3 - September 26), and after he got the printed FPCC membership forms on June 5 (22H800). It appears to precede Lee Exh. 5, which is dated August 1. Thus, although it was not copied for the FBI until late October, it was written in June or July, probably early in June.

It is necessary to look at the contents from the perspective of the FBI in 1963. The significant news was that Oswald was recruiting for a chapter in New Orleans and had decided to take an office.

What should have been done:

The significance of this recently released material is as follows: it confirms that the FBI did not take the expected action when it received information about Oswald's FPCC activities in New Orleans. That is nothing new, but this example is of special interest because it involves the question of an office. That is, the N.O. FBI appears to have consistently and selectively ignored evidence that Oswald had formed a FPCC chapter and had an office at 544 Camp Street.

I have previously written up the story of the Corliss Lamont pamphlet which Oswald gave Quigley in August 1963. Although Quigley reported that Oswald said there were no N.O. offices for the FPCC, Oswald also said the pamphlet contained information about the organization; the only such information was the rubber-stamped notation "FPCC / 544 Camp St. / New Orleans, La." As previously noted, neither Quigley nor DeBrueys mentioned this lead in their reports, although they did follow up leads about A. J. Hidell. This is simply not consistent with the absence of a special relationship between the FBI and Oswald.

Hosty testified that all FBI offices had been advised (some time before April 1963) to "be on the alert for the possible formation of chapters" of the FPCC (4H445). The general tone of CD 1085(a) shows how seriously the FBI took this organization, and how closely it was followed. (For example, there was either an informant or a bug at the Los Angeles chapter Executive Committee meeting on November 22.) Now we find that when the FBI learned in October 1963 that Oswald claimed he had decided to rent an office (and they didn't know the date of the letter), no apparent concern resulted, just as was the case in August when the Lamont pamphlet was put in the files. This would be extremely suspect behavior even if the address involved were not 544 Camp Street.

PLH